

UGANDA: PERFECTION OF POST-CONFLICT STABILITY OR TICKING TIME BOMB?

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UGANDA: PERFECTION OF POST-CONFLICT STABILITY OR TICKING TIME BOMB?

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This paper uses interviews with Ugandan local citizens, government officials, aid workers, NGO managers, and U.S. officials to re-evaluate the current degree of stability in Northern Uganda. It provides an alternative framing to the historical narrative, which forces new considerations for understanding the causes of conflict, drivers of the cessation of violence, and explanations for why the present situation in Uganda remains precarious. The findings show that complex social, political, and economic factors cause the region to remain highly susceptible to conflict almost 10 years after the displacement of the LRA, threatening not just Ugandan citizens but also East African stability and U.S. national security interests.

“Will there be another conflict? Yes, but not the LRA. The clear North-South divide is real. If there is conflict, the North will be very involved – there are lots of old fighters, just waiting. If anything happens, Museveni’s tribe will be targeted. It will no longer be North versus South, it will be entire Uganda versus West Uganda.” – Gulu Local Chairman, March 2015

INTRODUCTION

The situation in Northern Uganda has improved since the cessation of violence in 2006 but stability remains tenuous at best, and at the highest level, reconciliation efforts have failed to address underlying issues that contributed to the rise of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and its subsequent conflict. While the U.S. State Department is critical of crime rates and assesses the political and security environments as “relatively” stable, experts interviewed for this study, particularly those not affiliated with the U.S. government, stated the situation more starkly.¹ In general, interviewees described the environment as an uneasy peace, ripe for future conflict, and with few of the underlying causes of conflict any less significant than they were 20 years ago. These findings have implications for U.S. policy decisions in Uganda and, more generally, the way policymakers think about stability in post-conflict environments.

The intent of this research was to examine the drivers of post-conflict stability in Northern Uganda and to determine the extent to which it could be used as a model case study to improve regional stability in other post-conflict or conflict-prone areas. To do so, the researchers first conducted a comprehensive literature review to aggregate the current understanding of (1) what caused the LRA to

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form and engage in violence in Northern Uganda, (2) what caused the cessation of violence, and (3) the current degree of stability in Uganda. Then, the researchers followed this analysis with in-country field interviews of individuals in a number of sectors. Interviewees were chosen to maximize the scope of inputs across government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), and international perspectives. These included Ugandan citizens, government officials, aid workers and NGO program managers, and U.S. government officials.

In the first phase researchers found that current literature largely uses a standard narrative to describe why the LRA formed and what its motives for violence were, which will be discussed and assessed in the next section. Current literature also identifies a number of drivers for LRA displacement and stability in Northern Uganda—Ugandan government military action, U.S. military support, nongovernmental organization (NGO) activity, foreign aid, and even the formation of South Sudan—but no singular reason is consistently provided as the primary driver. Finally, the literature review yielded little in the way of current stability assessments—it is in this absence that the field interviews were most informative. In the following sections, this paper will summarize the existing narrative surrounding the LRA and the conflict in Northern Uganda, then provide an alternate narrative, which leans heavily on input from field experience. Finally, implications for U.S. policy will be discussed with a focus on how this paper’s findings can be used to improve security assessments and forecasts.

BACKGROUND OF THE LRA CONFLICT

To fully understand the current dynamics in Northern Uganda it is important to explore what allowed the LRA to develop, why the conflict lasted almost 20 years, and what caused the end to the conflict after such a long duration. However, despite the widespread attention the LRA has garnered, the conflict is typically not viewed in this holistic fashion and even when all three components are discussed superficial explanations are often given, leading to a shallow understanding of the current environment. Seen through a western lens, anthropologist Sverker Finnström sums up the “official discourse” on the conflict, even as reflected in speeches by President Obama, “the meaningless, criminal brutality of the LRA, the innocent-child victim, and the Western savior—the image that has informed the numerous interventions in northern Uganda.”² This section of the paper will briefly discuss the typical reasons stated for development, duration, and cessation of violence and then present an alternative narrative in the following section.

Significant research has been dedicated to the background of the LRA, Joseph Kony, and how the LRA developed. Due to the publicity raised from the Kony 2012 campaign many Americans are at least familiar with the name, and even this surface-level knowledge has driven attention from policymakers.³ The most commonly cited reason for the development of the LRA and subsequent

violence is that Northern Uganda is an area that has been historically susceptible to charismatic leaders, especially when those leaders are able to tie their causes to religious beliefs such as Alice Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Movement. When the U.S. Senior Defense Official and Defense Attache (SDO/DATT) to the U.S. Embassy in Uganda was queried regarding the stability in Uganda, his comments reflected this understanding of the conflict and current situation: “In Africa, [Uganda] is very stable.... The ‘problems’ are as much cultural as economic or political. Animistic spiritual belief is still—and will likely be for some time—a big part of Acholi identity.”⁴ The typical attributions to ethnic conflict and tribal warfare have also been bandied in reference to this specific conflict. Two of the few exceptions to superficial narratives are Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroots’ *The Lord’s Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* and Chris Dolan’s *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006*, which respectively provide a thorough background to the movement specific to the Ugandan crisis and an analysis of government and LRA actions in context of human rights.⁵

To explain how a relatively small-scale rebel group sustained conflict against a national military for almost two decades, U.S. reports largely focus on the “LRA’s fortuitous combination of murky international alliances, child soldiers, and bumbling enemies has proved stronger than any military offensive over the last 20 years.”⁶ This is in reference to shifting dynamics in Sudan, Kony’s tendency to use child soldiers as a cover and deterrent for forces to attack, and the corruption within the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) and estimated 20,000 ghost soldiers, allowing high level military officials to profit.⁷

Because elements of the LRA are still operating, primarily in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it is viewed as an active rebel or terrorist entity and less research is dedicated to what caused the cessation of hostilities in Northern Uganda. This lack of focus has potentially led to less substantiated explanations for the reduction of violence. For example, the expansion of U.S. military engagement is often cited as a key driver that led to the displacement of the rebels. Indeed, the SDO/DATT asserted that it was “undoubtedly UPDF military action that displaced the LRA from Northern Uganda,” whose capacity was significantly elevated by the information and assistance provided by the U.S. military beginning in 2004 and followed closely by the controversial amnesty and defector program.⁸ While these factors almost certainly assisted the ending of hostilities there are other, more critical, reasons that need to be explored in order to understand the current security climate.

AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE (1985-2006)

The basic reasons given for the development and displacement of the LRA—a gullible population susceptible to an eccentric rebel leader who eluded a professional military for almost 20 years until it finally, triumphantly stopped him—are missing a deeper understanding of true root factors. Much of the

current narrative is not necessarily wrong, but it incorrectly emphasizes the relative importance of events and drivers and only addresses surface tensions.

While it can be argued that the Acholi homeland is indeed susceptible to the persuasions of charismatic leaders, it is important to examine why this is the case. While Islam and Christianity are the predominant religions throughout the country, Northern Uganda has turned to traditional religions on multiple occasions due to desperation borne out of dire circumstances such as famine, foreign occupation, and slavery.⁹ One must also examine why there is deep-seated distrust and resentment between most of the regions in Uganda, especially the “North” versus the “South,” but one only needs to look at a few decades of recent history to understand this dynamic and see concrete reasons such as uneven resource distribution and government land-grabbing.

When the root causes of the conflict are identified and understood it can be seen that the LRA is symptomatic of underlying tensions and exacerbated regional differences—It is not the *cause* of these problems. The implication of this is that even though the LRA has been displaced (and no one interviewed for this research believes Kony has the desire or capacity to return) the conditions that allowed him to gain power in the first place still exist—another leader or group could take his place in the future, especially given evidence that openness to extreme beliefs is ignited during times of oppression.¹⁰

Interestingly, when questioned about what allowed the LRA conflict to persist for so long, the responses from Ugandans working in a variety of sectors differed considerably from what is commonly reported in literature. The overwhelming consistency in believing that the government had no political will to drive out the LRA as long as the violence was limited to the Northern region is notable.¹¹ Ms. Harriet Muwanga, a Ugandan working in USAID’s Kampala local capacity building office, explained, “The long duration of the the LRA conflict is due more to political reasons versus the actual ability of the LRA.”¹² This lack of will to end the conflict is not surprising given President Museveni is on record stating a preference for complete removal of the Acholis. Mr. Olara Otunnu, former foreign minister of Uganda and former UN Under-Secretary General and Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, claimed in 2006 that “This is the face of genocide. Like erstwhile regimes in Rwanda or the Balkans, the Museveni regime has stoked ethnic racism to gain and retain power, with such declarations by close associates as: ‘Those people’ are not human beings; ‘they’ are biological substances...who should be eliminated’; ‘We shall make ‘them’ become like the ensenene [grasshopper] insects; you know what happens when you trap them in a bottle and close the lid.’”¹³ Mr. Ottunnu has also stated that “the war also has served as a political alibi to defer addressing pressing national demands on issues such as multi-party democracy, corruption, nepotism, development imbalance, poverty, and social and military expenditures.”¹⁴ Sentiments almost identical to Mr. Ottunnu’s are echoed almost a decade later by Ugandans throughout the state, which reinforce the idea that Museveni’s National

Resistance Movement (NRM) party willingly allowed its Northern citizens to be terrorized and killed and speaks volumes to the need for national reconciliation.

The explanations offered regarding the cessation of violence also differed from usual reports. Ms. Anna Kreuss, a German freelance analyst, believes that local militias, formed in response to the huge problem of ghost soldiers and lack of formal military response, were more instrumental in pushing out the LRA than the UPDF she has spent years studying.¹⁵ Ms. Marianne Akuma and Ms. Hellen Achan from the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) attributed the eventual peace to pressures on the government from the international community. The North languishing in violence and the population displaced to camps affected development indicators, which eventually forced the will of the government to solve the conflict in order to show total growth and maintain or grow international aid and resources.¹⁶

One of the most compelling reasons shared regarding why the LRA thus far has permanently ceased violence in Northern Uganda came from Mr. Xavier Ejoyi, a Ugandan working in the peace and reconciliation sector.¹⁷ His commentary is relevant to share because most aspects of his explanations are not covered otherwise in academic literature. He addressed why the conflict was allowed to rage for so long, despite being between a “rag-tag” rebel group and an advanced military. He also believes the government did not have the political will to end it since the officers were benefitting from the conflict, the Nile provided a natural buffer that kept violence from penetrating to the South, and there was no real threat to the government center in Kampala. Even though peace talks were attempted in the past, especially by Ms. Betty Bigombe, Chief Mediator, the combination of the government not fully committing to ending the conflict and the desire to win the war, not simply agree to peace terms, meant that the conflict remained unresolved for 19 years, despite periodic lulls in the violence.

However, according to Mr. Ejoyi, the turning point occurred in 2003 when Mr. Jan Egeland, the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, visited and declared Northern Uganda the world’s largest humanitarian disaster, leading to pronounced international attention.¹⁸ NGO studies that had been done on the effects of the conflict finally received widespread circulation. Eventually, in 2005, with growing international pressures from organizations such as Oxfam, the UN Security Council formally addressed the plight in the North, resulting in the Emergency Action Plan for Humanitarian Assistance.¹⁹

While the international attention and aid received spurred by the Security Council’s actions were important in pressuring the Ugandan government to settle the violence, Mr. Ejoyi also highlighted the other important shift that revolved around the changes in the Sudanese government. When the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) settled with the government, the LRA lost their safe haven and supply chain in Southern Sudan. The LRA asked Vice President of Southern Sudan, Riek Machar, for renewed peace talks, which the Ugandan government accepted in July 2006. While the Juba

talks occurred, the LRA asked for a cease-fire. The Ugandan government agreed only if the LRA disclosed where their forces were located; the LRA refused this stipulation, and instead there were two locations agreed upon where the LRA forces would assemble and be retained. The delivered promise of food provided only in the assembly areas to the rebels for the duration of the talks meant that the cease-fire actually lasted.²⁰

Even though peace talks continued until April 2008 without any resulting signed peace agreement, this Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 26 August 2006 marked the true end of violence in Uganda. Of note, this also means that the LRA was not beaten out of the North, but instead forces walked out essentially on their own terms.

The peace talks were never signed, and the Uganda National Transitional Justice Policy is still currently only a draft. The central proposals address witness protection, traditional justice, truth-telling, reparations, and amnesty, all policies that would minimize the disparities in how individual victims and ex-rebels are treated today. However, at this point, some prime windows of opportunity for the government to distribute resources equally and unite the country have already passed. For example, many victims “point to ex-LRA combatants who received a ‘resettlement package’ upon the granting of amnesty, which included a monetary payment of 200,000 Ugandan Shillings (about 80 US Dollars). This has lead to the perception among some victims that ex-LRA fighters were rewarded for their role in the conflict, with victims not receiving any comparable individual reparation.”²¹

Ms. Akuma and Ms. Achan also expressed that the amnesty program has been beneficial, but not implemented perfectly. The disarmament and reintegration have gone relatively well, but after fighters renounce the rebellion against the government and are given a small start-up kit, there is no follow-up with them; the government has claimed that there are no resources for this. Furthermore, amnesty is only applied to the ex-rebels—there is no acknowledgement or process for reconciliation on behalf of the Ugandan military and atrocities committed, leading to anger and unresolved resentment.²²

Additionally, Ms. Akuma and Ms. Achan strongly believe that there is still a great need for reconciliation, not just for ex-LRA fighters and the communities they came from, but also for the country as a whole and to address the feeling that the government abandoned entire regions of Uganda. ACORD’s Social Peace and Recovery Model has set an example for community healing, where the focus is geared more towards communities, not former combatants.²³ The belief is that specific focus on survivors leads to stigmatization by the rest of the community, especially when the suffering was and is so wide-spread.²⁴

In summary, the United States has conflated the neutering of the LRA with stability. However, Ugandan citizens, particularly in the North, are deeply dissatisfied with their socio-economic conditions. This dissatisfaction benefitted the LRA, but it also helped Museveni retain power. The absence of the

LRA brings the short-term relief that is being experienced today, but it also exposes the deep-rooted problems plaguing the country. While the end of violence should not be discounted, nothing was inherently “fixed” in the region; whether one looks at the factors for LRA development or LRA displacement, conflict drivers are still present and instability is likely to reemerge. A deeper understanding of the true nature of the conflict is imperative for policymakers to understand.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF STABILITY (2006-PRESENT)

Because of sentiments common throughout Uganda still today, it is not sufficient to merely acknowledge and understand that a more complex conflict history exists. An in-depth understanding of the current situation needs to be used to inform future policy decisions.

Research, formal interviews, and informal conversations in various regions almost unanimously confirmed the complexities exhibited in the alternate narrative and that significant tensions still exist. While no interviewees predicted or expected that the LRA could or would have the motivation to return to Uganda, nearly every interview indicated that if another actor wanted to fill the Kony void or incite violence it could easily be accomplished. The primary justification for this position was the significant number of underlying social and economic tensions that have not been addressed by the government. One interviewee summarized this well: “Outside viewers see a relative calm, but there's lots under the surface not resolved. It's an eerie calm. Large questions are unresolved that are being avoided or are unable to be solved. There is a sharp North-South divide, with really two Ugandas in one. A lot has changed. There's uncertainty even in fundamentals that could be exploited by another Joseph Kony.”²⁵

This sentiment was echoed by others who described the situation as “a latent calm” in which “possibly something could spark.”²⁶ Nearly all interviewees articulated the presence of unaddressed problems and that “if [the issues] are not looked into, it will take [Uganda] back to a bigger war.”²⁷ Multiple interviewees attributed current “war fatigue” as the only reason that lingering anger and resentment toward the government and the rest of the country have not resulted in further internal strife.²⁸ As an indication that war fatigue does not represent sustainable peace, it is clear that without a national reconciliation process this period is only a lull before a new player starts a conflict with the government. “Conditions are not promising for peace. War fatigue is the only reason there is no conflict yet. It will only spark when people realize there is no hope. Right now they lack a war leader. There are thousands of trained youth, either abducted by the LRA or the government-trained militia, never properly disarmed.”²⁹

Some offered thoughts on what specific issue was most significant. One interviewee said “It's a fragile peace. Land disputes are the biggest reason for tension...riots in the past have targeted Asians and Western Ugandans, who were seen as unfairly benefiting from the state.”³⁰ When asked specifically

about current stability and what could trigger additional conflict, responses varied, but most involved the uncertainty of political transition and a reduction in war fatigue. For example, one interviewee explained “the biggest threat to me is the lack of planned transition from one leader to another. Elections are a non-issue, Museveni will win. [But] a precipitating factor to violence would be if Museveni dropped dead or something happened. There would be chaos.”³¹ From additional conversations, it appears that additional unresolved historical wounds, ongoing land conflicts, inter-region border tensions, and cattle raiding are all serving to prevent a full peace process.

When asked specifically about the likelihood of renewed conflict, most interviewees also indicated that it was likely. “The area is a ticking time bomb without ongoing efforts. There’s an entire group of young men trained in military tactics that have said, ‘We’re ready, just call us.’ The LRA might not come back, but another issue could flare up.”³² Another interviewee added “if a formidable rebellion was formed, people would probably still join because of latent grievances.”³³ It was frequent to hear “all that’s missing is a leader.”

Perhaps the most poignant response came from Gulu’s Local Chairman, Mr. Ojara Mapenduzi. “Will there be another conflict? Yes, but not the LRA. The clear North-South divide is real. If there is conflict, the North will be very involved—there are lots of old fighters, just waiting. If anything happens, Museveni’s tribe will be targeted. It will no longer be North versus South, it will be entire Uganda versus West Uganda [Museveni’s home region].”³⁴

For evidence that locals are not unjustly paranoid of further violence, one only needs to look as far back as the July 2014 civilian-instigated violence in Rwenzori that left 90 people dead and caught the government and political analysts off-guard. This event is indicative of tensions throughout the country, which is especially worrisome if it leads to weaknesses along the DRC border.³⁵

All of the interviewee sentiments are in line with the Refugee Law Project’s (RLP) overarching analysis of the present-day situation. According to Mr. Stephen Oola, a leader at RLP, in the case of Uganda today there are six distinct conflict risk factors. First are resource related issues, such as the president making land deals directly with corporations. Additionally, there is a belief that the government has long term plans to maximize land profits to the state—the less educated do not have a good sense of the value of their land and have been persuaded to sell it to the government for minimal amounts. There are many stories of properties that were sold to the government and then a couple of years later valuable minerals were “unexpectedly” discovered.

The next conflict risk factor Mr. Oola identifies is the lack of transitional justice measures. Mr. Orach Otobi, victim, witness, and now private consultant, shared the widespread fear that “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will never see the light of day; there’s too much anti-government truth that will come out.”³⁶ There is a national apathy with deep-rooted anger towards the government but

acknowledgement of corruption. Many people believe that voting for the NRM is the only hope of at least getting some resources back, but Mr. Oola believes that really voting is meaningless because Uganda is not a true democracy.

Furthermore, because the Ugandan government has relied so heavily on civil society organizations (CSOs) to repair communities in the North, some CSO workers are concerned that even if reparations are ever agreed upon, it would be impossible to fairly distribute the resources without properly investigated and documented evidence.³⁷ Ultimately, the government has cornered itself with no perfect options. A Transitional Justice Policy was and is desperately needed, even if it is imperfect. For example, the draft policy addresses amnesty and justice for atrocities by ex-rebels but omits mentioning how atrocities by military members will be dealt with, leading one to conclude they will not be dealt with even through traditional means, which could create even more tensions in the region.

The third risk factor is the growing marginalization of the large youth population, with a large percent unemployed, unemployable, or only possessing military skills; particularly of note is the subset of this population that are former child combatants, some even born in the bush and raised to fight as rebels their entire life. Many of these young ex-rebels do not feel accepted by their communities or do not trust the government amnesty program. This leads them to look for other opportunities to earn a living at the only thing they know, such as fighting in South Sudan, not due to believing in the ideology of the cause but due to lack of opportunities for them.³⁸ This demographic therefore contributes to ongoing regional instability but also presents a population that a developing rebel movement in Uganda could easily mobilize.

The fourth factor is changing gender roles, and a society struggling to adjust to new norms. The large presence of western NGOs that gave women opportunities left men idle in the displaced-persons camps. This resulted in many turning to alcoholism and domestic violence, feeling insignificant as their children grew up now seeing women as the head of the house. While some of the gender changes might be viewed as progress, without vibrant CSOs, this dynamic only exacerbates current societal tensions.

Also, the fear factor must be acknowledged—citizens know that the LRA is still active and worry about exactly where they are or if they are ever returning. Many children and family members are still missing. Of the ex-fighters, who is going to the ICC? The vast uncertainty in many aspects has made it difficult to put the conflict entirely in the past for the affected areas.

And finally, as long as the Sudan area remains unstable despite supposed peace, there will continue to be an influx of displaced persons, many with weapons, and all unaccounted for.³⁹ When viewed holistically, it is sadly too easy to see that this current period of peace is just a lull in the storm and the main question is when, not if, it will end.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Both for the situation in Uganda specifically, and for other similar movements more generally, the findings of this paper—that the country is primed for implosion, giving rise to terrorist groups and potentially capitulating the East African region into chaos—offer considerations for U.S. policy and security assessments. Specifically, two observations appear critical. First, the cessation of violence does not, in itself, imply long term stability. Second, that social, political, and economic factors may have a greater role to play than any one specific violent movement. Recognizing and addressing this potential threat falls directly in line with the 2011 U.S. Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities (PSD-10), which states, “Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.”⁴⁰ While some policymakers may be inclined to disregard the potential for violent conflict in a remote, relatively isolated part of the world, it is not difficult to make the connection to other situations. The potential for terrorist networks to make inroads with a poor, frustrated population, insecurity in an already fragile region, and the possibility to add to the international refugee crisis are all considerations that drive the relevancy of these findings.

For example, the following description for Boko Haram could easily be describing the LRA in the 1980s or the on-going conditions in Northern Uganda that are ripe for a future group to take hold:

[Boko Haram] evolved from a fringe radical group into a force to be reckoned with when it launched a revenge-based insurgency campaign that gained momentum and some local support. The military’s harsh tactics and petty corruption alienated local residents, making it easier for Boko Haram to recruit volunteers. Analysts say the group has also successfully exploited social and economic inequities endemic to the northeast. The region has some of the highest unemployment in the country.⁴¹

Similarly in Uganda, Kony initially had the support of the local population and did not perpetuate widespread violence against the non-military populace until 1994, at which point he lost the civilian support and turned to support from southern Sudan.⁴² However, by this point he already had manpower, weapons, and safe-havens, parallel to Boko Haram’s current strength even though the majority public sentiment has turned against the group.

For further comparison, “63% of the people in the northern [Uganda] region were estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2003, compared to the national average of 39%, and to 22%, 46% and 33% for the central, eastern, and western regions, respectively.”⁴³ This can be attributed to not just underdevelopment and inability to earn a livable wage while living in camps, but to others factors as well, such as the frequent looting of possessions, especially cattle, by both the LRA and UPDF forces. Many in the North see this as a deliberate strategy of repression to keep the Acholi poor in order to better control them.⁴⁴ Even in 2013, seven years after the displacement of the LRA, the unemployment rate in Uganda was 38%, but the rate in Gulu District averaged almost 60%.⁴⁵ With the combination of inequality issues

and on-going desperation in the North, history could easily be repeated. A rebel movement needs to only gain the support of the people and develop strength to the point where eventually it has the resources to fully operate independently, and another LRA or Boko Haram equivalent could emerge in Northern Uganda.

Further impacts to U.S. national interests involve Uganda's deep entanglement in the larger regional conflicts of DRC and South Sudan. The LRA conflict has involved Sudan in a multitude of ways, such as arms trafficking, refugee issues, and safe harbor for rebels since almost the beginning. For example:

In the early 1990s, the government in Khartoum began to support the LRA/M with logistics and military equipment, and for many years the LRA/M had its base camps in southern Sudan....Former rebels observe that LRA/M camps, located on the frontier in the war in southern Sudan...functioned as a buffer between the central Sudanese army and the south Sudanese rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). In return for this support, the LRA/M fought alongside the Sudanese army and its allied groups against the south Sudanese rebels.⁴⁶

The National Islamic Front government of Sudan aided Kony (in retaliation for Museveni's support for the SPLM/A), by providing resources, logistics support, and a place to regroup where the Ugandan army would not cross the border to pursue. This arrangement only changed primarily in 2005 with the peace accord between the Sudanese government and the SPLA, leading to the LRA seeking safe haven in DRC between attacks and weakening its capabilities, contributing to acceptance of peace talks around the same time that Museveni was also pressured internationally to actually end violence.

Also of concern are the historic cases of regional instability stemming from Ugandan unrest, especially in times of retribution for past political oppression. A relatively recent history example addresses the thousands of Acholi that were targeted and murdered under Idi Amin's regime, who was from and favored the West Nile region. After his fall, many soldiers in the new army, including Acholi, took revenge through torture and killing people in the West Nile region. Furthermore, pro-Amin insurgents from now DRC and Sudan also attacked the region, resulting in around 300,000 people fleeing the country to escape the violence.⁴⁷

In light of this historical context, one can easily make the connection that the current, on-going disenfranchised sentiment in the North could result in revenge-seeking if the balance of power shifts, such as with the 2017 presidential elections. The massive instability already in the region and increasing refugee issue in Europe make adding sources of displaced persons a frightening prospect for a number of other states.

Because the United States acknowledges Uganda as a key strategic partner in Eastern Africa and has maintained friendly relations throughout the LRA conflict, America has secured a position that could allow it to exert pressure on the Museveni regime. However, despite the clear threats to American national security interests that lingering LRA-related issues currently present, and the foreseeable conflict the right rebel movement spark could reignite, the majority of its \$474M in foreign assistance for FY 2015 goes to health programs. The U.S. Congressional Budget Justification states that “The United States supports long-term development programs to provide community reconciliation, enhanced security, and development in the historically conflict-affected Karamoja region.”⁴⁸ However, it is important to note that Karamoja is an area in the Northeast that was not an area of LRA operations. It has suffered from relatively small-scale civil unrest for decades and is an area of concern, but even though distrust remains, the area is largely disarmed. The regions where the LRA was allowed to develop and subsequently terrorize, such as Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, and Lira, are not specifically mentioned. This indicates that policy is following current mild hotspots and not analyzing areas of massive potential to erupt again, which goes directly in-line with PSD-10’s critique, “Governmental engagement on atrocities and genocide too often arrives too late, when opportunities for prevention or low-cost, low-risk action have been missed.”⁴⁹

U.S. and international resources in general could make a tremendous difference if they supported the civil society driven Peace, Recovery and Development Programme and pressured the government to finalize and sign the draft Uganda National Transitional Justice Policy. It is not sufficient that the Ugandan government has created a Justice and Law Order Sector (JLOS), which has been tasked with creating and implementing a transitional justice framework in Uganda. Even if it has made progress in building consensus on blending traditional and modern, formal justice mechanisms, national legislation has still not been passed, nor is funding allocated. Unfortunately, “in the absence of this guidance from JLOS, traditional justice in Northern Uganda will continue to be perceived with a degree of bemusement, which will ultimately not contribute towards utilizing different approaches to promoting reconciliation.”⁵⁰ External pressures are needed to achieve state-backed progress in actually addressing reconciliation and development issues.

Part of the reason that U.S. efforts are not directed at affecting true reconciliation in Uganda is that the United States has an incentive to maintain its regional partner. As long as Museveni keeps internal unrest to a minimum (or at least contained within Ugandan borders), continues to promote regional stability through organizations such as the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, and supports African Union Mission in Somalia against insurgents in Somalia, the United States may not take the risk of pressuring Museveni for domestic reforms. However, the current precarious stability should not be accepted as an indicator that no domestic reforms are needed, especially when viewed in light of

Burundi's "surprising" quick descent into chaos. This neighbor's crisis provides all the more impetus for policymakers to demonstrate true understanding of what allowed the LRA conflict to happen in the first place and how all the same conflict drivers are still present in order to intervene before there are no stable states in the Eastern African region.

CONCLUSION

The pattern of minimal NRM political will to solve issues without international pressure is repeating in the lack of justice initiatives that are needed to actually make true progress in the North and diminish existing issues that leave the door wide-open for another rebel movement. Many Ugandans arguably rightfully believe that too much is at stake for the government to foster true openness and reconciliation without deliberate and sustained international intervention. Especially as the rest of the region remains mired in conflict or erupts in violence, it is imperative for policymakers to make responsible choices with funds committed, programs planned, and pressure exerted. Willingness to acknowledge deeper realities could better guide foreign relationships, possibly leading to massive future savings in lives and money by heading off coming crises. As appealing as it is to believe that civil strife only affects the lives of people within those borders, the current refugee situation affecting both Europe and the United States is a perfect example of international security and humanitarian repercussions of inaction.

As reported in the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on the U.S. Policy to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army, as of April 2012 the United States had "provided over \$750 million to support northern Uganda's post-conflict recovery since 2007....Challenges remain, but tremendous progress has been made."⁵¹ While progress indeed has been made, the numerous assessments by interviewees in 2015 that the North is still highly susceptible to conflict, perhaps even more so now than immediately post-ceasefire, threaten to negate the positive advancements enabled by aid. Unless Museveni makes significant reforms, especially in terms of land tenure issues, foreign assistance will continue to be a gesture of goodwill to an African government the United States wants to believe is stable and nothing more.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ “U.S. Relations with Uganda,” U.S. State Department, last modified October 8, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2963.htm>.
- ² Finnstrom, 2008, in Adam Branch, *Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p 5.
- ³ Rainie, Lee et al, “The Viral Kony 2012 Video,” *Pew Research Center*, March 15, 2012, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/03/15/the-viral-kony-2012-video/>.
- ⁴ Anderson, Patrick, (Colonel, Senior Defense Official and Defense Attache, U.S. Embassy), email interview by the authors, March 16, 2015.
- ⁵ Allen, Tim and Koen Vlassenroot, *The Lord’s Resistance Army* (New York: Zed Books, 2010) and Chris Dolan, *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).
- ⁶ Wilkerson, Michael, “Why Can’t Anyone Stop the LRA?” *Foreign Policy*, April 15, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/04/15/why-cant-anyone-stop-the-lra/>.
- ⁷ Allen and Vlassenroot, p. 58.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, p. 115.
- ⁹ For examples dating back to the 1890s, see Kefa Otiso, *Culture and Customs of Uganda* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 30-31.
- ¹⁰ Otobi, Orach, (Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative, private consultant, and conflict survivor), personal interview by authors, Gulu, Uganda, March 27, 2015. Mr. Otobi held an interesting reason in why he was certain the LRA would not return. He believes the LRA fears that its troops would defect. Since many of the remaining forces are assumed to be from the Ugandan area of conflict, if they returned to their homeland, they would see that relatives they were told were dead are actually alive and give them reason to think there are people that would accept them back.
- ¹¹ Akuma, Marianne, (Transitional Justice Coordinator, The Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD)) and Hellen Achan (Advocacy Policy Officer, ACORD), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 23, 2015.
- ¹² Muwanga, Harriet, (USAID), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 24, 2015.
- ¹³ Ottunu, Olara, “Uganda: Nation in Crisis Thanks to Divisive Regime,” *allAfrica*, Sep, 19, 2006, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200609190945.html>.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁵ Kreuss, Anna, (freelance journalist and PhD student), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 24, 2015.
- ¹⁶ Akuma and Achan interview.
- ¹⁷ Ejoyi, Xavier, (leader in peace and reconciliation and transitional justice sector), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 25, 2015.
- ¹⁸ “War in Northern Uganda World’s Worst Forgotten Crisis: UN,” *Agence France-Presse*, November 11, 2003, <http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/war-northern-uganda-worlds-worst-forgotten-crisis-un>.
- ¹⁹ “Oxfam Chides UN Security Council for Non-Action in Ugandan Conflict,” *Agence France-Presse*, May 11, 2005, <http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/oxfam-chides-un-security-council-non-action-ugandan-conflict>.
- ²⁰ Ejoyi interview.

²¹ Bradfield, Paul, "Uganda Announces Transitional Justice Policy," *Beyond the Hague*, August 9, 2013, <http://beyondthehague.com/2013/08/09/the-lapse-of-amnesty-in-uganda-stimulating-accountability-or-prolonging-conflict/>.

²² Anonymous (development consulting sector and founding member of Black Monday Movement), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 24, 2015.

²³ The Social Peace and Recovery has application for other conflicts as well. For example, when land disputes threatened to erupt in violence in Kitgum, local leaders approached ACORD and applied the model, facilitating dialogue and ultimately preventing escalation.

²⁴ Wide-spread suffering refers to not only the population killed by rebels, but also to the approximately 70,000 children abducted and the large number of internally displaced people, nearing 2 million civilians at the height of the conflict. In 2005, about 1,000 Ugandans in camps died every week, mostly from curable diseases and malnutrition. "Health and Mortality Survey Among Internally Displaced Persons in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda," *World Health Organization*, July 2005, ii.

²⁵ Anonymous interview.

²⁶ Akuma interview.

²⁷ Akwero, Jacinta, (Program Manager, ACORD), personal interview by authors, Gulu, Uganda, March 27, 2015.

²⁸ "War Fatigue" interviews: Otobi, Oola, Opiyo interviews.

²⁹ Oola, Stephen, (Conflict, Transitional Justice, and Governance Manager, Refugee Law Project (RLP)) and Lyandro Komakech (Senior Research and Advocacy Officer, RLP), personal interview by authors, Kampala, Uganda, March 25, 2015.

³⁰ Opiyo, Nicholas, (law affiliated with Kampala Law School and former child commuter), phone interview by authors, April 5, 2015. The land grab issue is corroborated by Uganda's *The Independent*, "Museveni Angry Over NGO Report on Land Grabbing" that reported in 2012 that Museveni himself as well as local elites and army generals personally allocate and to investors and order evictions. Critics have faulted the government for brutally carrying out evictions, not compensating evictees, and not securing alternate homes for them.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² A politician at the 4 Dec 2014 National Stakeholders' Forum on Transitional Justice in Uganda, as quoted by Hellen Achan during interview.

³³ Otobi interview.

³⁴ Mapenduzi, Ojara, (District Chairman, Gulu District Local Government 5), personal interview by authors, Gulu, Uganda, March 27, 2015. This comment dovetails with Ms. Harriet Muwanga's belief, as stated during interview, that the Southern regions have also turned negative against Museveni, recognizing that "corruption is out of hand and the economy is not as strong as it should be."

³⁵ Kreuss interview.

³⁶ Otobi interview.

³⁷ Akwero interview.

³⁸ Inputs from Akuma and Achan interview as well as "U.S. Policy to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate*, 112th Congress Second Session, April 24, 2012.

³⁹ Oola interview.

⁴⁰ Obama, Barack, "Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities," U.S. White House, August 4, 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/04/presidential-study-directive-mass-atrocities>.

⁴¹ Baker, Aryn, "The Battle for Nigeria," *Time*, February 5, 2015, p. 36.

⁴² The ideological and tactical shift against civilians occurred when Kony seemed to blame the Acholis for the inability to win the war or negotiate an acceptable peace as noted in Jordan Guthrie, *State-Society Relations in Uganda: The Search for Security, Development, and State Legitimacy* (Dalhousie University: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2008), p. 78. It is worth noting that this is in direct contrast with the SDO/DATT to Uganda's claim in email interview, "The LRA was never an insurgency with the support of the local populace as is typical in most insurgencies."

⁴³ Mutambi, Rose, Richard Hasunira, and Dr. Vincent Oringa, "Intersectoral Action on Health in a Conflict Situation: A Case Study of Kitgum District, Northern Uganda," *World Health Organization*, August 2007, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Between 1983 and 2001 in Gulu and Amuru districts, the head of cattle decreased from 123,375 to 3,000. Finnstrom, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁵ "Gulu District Local Government Statistical Abstract 2012/13," *The Republic of Uganda*, June 2013, p. 31, http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/2009_HLG_%20Abstract_printed/CIS+UPLOADS/Higher%20Local%20Government%20Statistical%20Abstracts_2014/Gulu.pdf.

⁴⁶ Finnstrom, p. 84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁴⁸ "Uganda Foreign Assistance," *ForeignAssistance.gov*, <http://beta.foreignassistance.gov/explore/country/Uganda>.

⁴⁹ Obama, PSD-10, August 4, 2011.

⁵⁰ Lino Owor Ogora and Tim Murithi, "Traditional Justice and War Crimes in Northern Uganda," *Justice and Reconciliation Project - Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*, Policy Brief 1 (August 2011): p. 7.

⁵¹ "U.S. Policy to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army," *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate*, 112th Congress Second Session, April 24, 2012.

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